G7 side event
"Universities for Sustainable Development"
Bologna, 11th June 2017

G72017
ITALIA

Concept Note

Introduction

Worldwide, university systems are affected by increasing competition, the rise of social expectations and in many cases by the need to do more and better with less. The changes taking place in society, economy, environment, technology and legal systems, require universities to respond to a number of contingent interests in potential conflict.

At the same time, universities need to promote cooperation in academic systems as well as networks and lasting partnerships with business, government and other social actors in a forward-looking perspective. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development indicates the horizon, the commitments of the global community, objectives, targets and indicators for measuring its achievement.

In this context, in which universities need to combine competition and cooperation, academic excellence and efficiency, quality and equity, environmental sustainability is not just only one of many available options, but is instead a necessary and responsible development strategy.

Green university rankings are growing in prominence, as both students and universities place more importance on environmental responsibility. Sustainability at universities generally means to i) provide research and teaching on sustainability, ii) adopt internal measures addressed to reduce deleterious environmental effects and to cut carbon and energy bills, and iii) contribute promoting knowledge and science-based regulations and innovation on sustainability, joining public-private partnerships and actions.

University systems and institutional governance are facing the challenge of sustainability, having to promote multidisciplinarity and cooperation, consistently orienting the internal decision-making processes, resource allocation, organizational redesign, incentives for

teaching and research, accountability to local territories, national governments and the international community.

All this falls within an overall context of opportunities, recognizing environmental sustainability as a new framework for an integrated approach to planning, reporting and networking through which providing strategic direction and capacity building to the many economic, social and government actors involved in environmental protection.

There is interest among many academics and practitioners in taking Sustainable Development practices within University, and there is recognition of the opportunity that the concept holds for a positive impact on the whole environment, economy and society.

However, there is limited understanding of what University can contribute to its full scale effective implementation. University can prominently contribute to the process by training the required scientists, engineers, economists and professionals along with the knowledge required for the development of improved technologies, regulations and business models. University can also contribute to the creation of new and tailored start ups and spin offs as well as to the identification of new market potentials. This surely requires better linking of research, teaching and operations, and creating further interconnections between academic disciplines and between these and industry, government and society.

Discussion structure

HOW UNIVERSITIES CAN CONTRIBUTE BOOSTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Opening talks by Co-Chairs (15 min) to set the scene.

Objectives of the panel: share experiences and develop a common roadmap on the University contribution to a more effective implementation of Sustainable Development principles and practices in the G7 countries.

The following are discussion areas that will help steer the interactive workshop:

Morning session:

1. How are Universities rethinking the courses and curricula, teaching, and research programs, to address the agenda of Environmental Sustainability?
2. In which courses and how Sustainable Development principles and practices should be taught ? Which disciplines should be mobilized?
3. How can Universities green their internal management (sustainable management, green public/private procurement, ...)?

Afternoon session:

4. In which domains of Sustainable Development, University research can contribute in advancing technology, innovation, regulations and market?
5. How can University foster entrepreneurship in the Circular Economy (Resource Efficiency, 3Rs, Zero-Carbon Economy, Bio-Economy) domain?
6. How can networking between research, education/training and business facilitate Circular Economy (Resource Efficiency, 3Rs, Zero-Carbon Economy, Bio-Economy) implementation?

Co-chairs:

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Panellists:

- one University speaker per G7 country in the morning, focusing on discussion questions 1, 2 and 3;
- one University speaker per G7 country in the afternoon, focusing on discussion questions 4, 5 and 6;

10 mins each (with indicatively 4 slides) for answering to (some of) the 3 questions.

Presentations followed by open discussion facilitated by the Co-Chairs.
A Rapporteur will take notes.

Conclusions of the day: Co-Chairs and Rapporteur.

Monday 12th June

The Rapporteur will report to the G7 Environment Ministers on early Monday 12th.